



FEMA

Quick Reopening of Supermarket Served Hurricane Survivors

Galveston, TX - In the wee hours of Saturday, September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike barreled ashore as a strong Category 2 storm, bringing wind gusts up to 125 miles per hour (mph) and a storm surge that spilled over the 17-foot high Galveston seawall.

The disaster shut down the island for many long days thereafter. But a bright spot beckoned in the landscape of destruction. Next to the seawall, one grocery store reopened in only three and a half days. For many more days, townspeople could find few other sources of food and essential provisions.

"I have talked to probably 400 of our regular customers, and they say this store was their only ray of normal reality," said Tom Herring, manager of the Signature Kroger Grocery Store at 5730 Seawall Blvd., shortly after the storm. "They could come in and enjoy air conditioning, get hot food, get away from their daily trouble for a couple of hours before going back to start cleaning again."

How did the store do it? Herring said, "We were able to survive the storm with very minimal damage and to reopen quickly because of many things that we did before, during, and after the storm."

Herring explained that the beachfront store, built in 2000, "was designed to have water roll to the left and the right, so the store wouldn't be impacted so much." He continued, "When they built this store, they brought in extra fill to raise the lot, built up more on a concrete pad, and raised the store quite a bit. We have a disaster plan, but everything hinges on the physical structure of the building, whether anything survives or not."

"The sturdy masonry structure complied with all building codes when the structure was built," said David Ewald, City of Galveston building official. In fact, the structure was built more than two feet above the height required by floodplain regulations, according to Kroger officials.

The building sits on a prized though precarious spot along the Gulf of Mexico behind the seawall. "If that seawall wasn't there, we wouldn't be standing here today," Herring said. "It did its job of keeping the majority of the water at least off the properties where there is a seawall." Some of the surge came over the seawall, which is considerably higher than the popular frontage businesses, including Kroger.

Kroger's staff conducted a blitz of preparedness activities before the storm hit. "We had shutters on all our windows — which were already protected by a masonry-columned promenade — sandbagged the doors and put heavy pallets of merchandise on our bay doors to keep them from blowing in," Herring said. "What we did is like the normal precautions you would do at your house before a storm, but on a little larger scale."

"So when we opened the door to check things out on Monday after the storm, there was no water in the store, and very minimal roof damage; a few small leaks, hardly any damage at all to the store," Herring said.



Galveston County,
Texas



Quick Facts

Sector:

Private

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Elevation, Structural

Primary Funding:

Property Owner, Commercial